

Message Text

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TAGS: SNAR, LA

SUBJECT: NARCOTICS CONTROL SITUATION IN LAOS

REF: STATE 235699

1. FOLLOWING IS SITREP REQUESTED REFTEL FOR INCLUSION
IN BRIEFING BOOK FOR THE UPCOMING EA NARCOTICS
CONFERENCE IN SINGAPORE:

A. THE PROBLEM - A GOLDEN TRIANGLE COUNTRY, LAOS
HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A POPPY-GROWING AND OPIUM-
RIPRODUCING AREA. FOR MANY YEARS, WHEN SUCH PRODUCTION
WAS LEGAL AND SALES CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT, PRO-
DUCTION WAS IN EXCESS OF 100 TONS PER YEAR, AND MOST
OF IT WAS CONSUMED DOMESTICALLY. IN THE LATE 1960'S,
A LUCRATIVE MARKET DEVELOPED IN VIETNAM, AND LAOS,
ALTHOUGH NEVER A PRINCIPAL TRANSIT OR REFINING COUNTRY,
BECAME ONE OF SEVERAL SUPPLIERS OF ILLICIT DRUGS TO
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AMERICAN FORCES IN VIETNAM.

B. THE PROGRAM - IN RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S DECLARATION OF WAR ON INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING IN JUNE 1971, THE US MISSION IN LAOS DRAFTED A NARCOTICS CONTROL ACTION PLAN WHICH HAD AS ITS INITIAL GOAL TO: (1) MAKE DRUG PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING ILLEGAL IN LAOS AND (2) OBTAIN HIGH-LEVEL RLG SUPPORT FOR, AND RLG PARTICIPATION IN, ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS. FROM THE OUTSET, THE KING OF LAOS AND PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA HAVE BOTH GIVEN THEIR FULL SUPPORT TO THE PROGRAM, AND, IN SEPTEMBER 1971, THE RLG FORMALLY PROMULGATED ITS ANTI-NARCOTICS LAW. WITH PASSAGE OF THE LAW, THE PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT PHASE OF THE NARCOTICS CONTROL PROGRAM GOT UNDERWAY IMMEDIATELY. A MAJOR SUBSEQUENT ACCOMPLISHMENT WAS THE FORMATION OF THE GROUPE SPECIALE D'INVESTIGATION (GSI) IN AUGUST 1972. GSI IS AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION, OPERATING OUT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATION OF ALL NARCOTICS CONTROL EFFORTS IN LAOS. IT IS HEADED BY AN AGGRESSIVE BRIGADIER GENERAL AND ITS STAFF CONSISTS OF OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO IT BY LAO CUSTOMS, LAO NATIONAL POLICE AND LAO MILITARY POLICE, ON THE AMERICAN SIDE, THE MISSION HAS APPROXIMATELY 20 PERSONS WORKING ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE NARCOTICS PROGRAM. THEY INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVES OF DEA, CUSTOMS, USAID (PUBLIC SAFETY, PUBLIC HEALTH, AGRICULTURE AND PROGRAM COORDINATION), THE EMBASSY AND USIS.

C. THE RESULTS - A COMBINATION OF FACTORS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT TO DATE OF THE PROGRAM'S PRIMARY GOALS, I.E., REMOVAL OF LAOS AS A SOURCE OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN THE INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC. THESE FACTORS INCLUDE JOINT USG-RLG ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS, AS WELL AS THE WAR-INDUCED MOVEMENT OF MANY POPPY-GROWING HILL-TRIBESMEN FROM THE HILLSIDES TO THE VALLEYS. AT PRESENT, OPIUM PRODUCTION IN LAOS HAS DROPPED TO APPROXIMATELY 20 TONS PER YEAR, AN AMOUNT WHICH IS INADEQUATE TO SUPPLY ALL OF ITS DOMESTIC ADDICTS. THUS, LAOS HAS BECOME A NET IMPORTER OF ILLICIT OPIUM TO MEET THIS DEMAND. WHILE THIS SITUATION CAN CHANGE, ESPECIALLY IF AND WHEN

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HILLTRIBE REFUGEES MOVE BACK TO THEIR OLD VILLAGES, THE U.S. MISSION AND THE RLG ARE MAKING A CONCERTED EFFORT TO DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES (IN TERMS OF CROP SUBSTITUTION AND ALTERNATE INCOME PROGRAMS) THAT WILL ENABLE THE FARMERS TO PLANT CROPS OTHER THAN THE OPIUM POPPY OR TO MAKE A LIVELIHOOD IN OTHER WAYS. EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVES IN SINGAPORE INTEND TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE IN GREATER DEPTH AT THE CONFERENCE.

D. THE FUTURE - THE IMMINENT FORMATION OF A
NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT WILL SURELY HAVE SOME EFFECT
ON THE NARCOTICS CONTROL EFFORTS IN LAOS. SINCE (1)
GSI IS PART OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND WILL
THEREFORE NOT EXPERIENCE AN INFUSION OF LPF PERSONNEL,
AND (2) THE LPF HAS PUBLICLY VOICED OPPOSITION TO
NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN THEIR ZONE, WE BELIEVE THAT
ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW GOVERNMENT WILL NOT SIGNIFICANTLY
AFFECT THE RLG'S PART OF THE DRUG PROGRAM. IT MAY,
HOWEVER, AFFECT THE ABILITY OF US NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT
AGENTS TO OPERATE FREELY IN THE FIELD AS THEY HAVE
PREVIOUSLY. THE US MISSION IS THEREFORE ATTEMPTING TO
LOWER ITS PROFILE IN AN EFFORT TO STREAMLINE ITS ANTI-
NARCOTICS SUPPORT EFFORT WITHOUT IN ANY WAY AFFECTING ITS
PRESENT EFFICIENCY. WE WILL CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE THE
ENFORCEMENT ASPECT OF THE PROGRAM, BUT, AS WE LOOK AHEAD,
WE WILL NEED TO STRESS INCREASINGLY THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC
SIDE OF THE LAO DRUG PROBLEM. AS THE LAO BEGIN TO GRASP
THE FACT THAT THEIR ENDEMIC DRUG PROBLEM HAS THE POTENTIAL
OF BECOMING EPIDEMIC, WE EXPECT, AND ARE ALREADY
BEGINNING TO FEEL PRESSURE FROM THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
AND LOCAL PRESS FOR AN ENLARGED RLG-USG EFFORT IN THE
AREAS OF ADDICT TREATMENT, CROP SUBSTITUTION AND ALTERNATIVE INCOMES.
TO
DEVELOP ANSWERS IN THESE FIELDS, THE US MISSION AND RLG
INTEND TO DRAW ON THE EXPERTISE AVAILABLE IN NEIGHBORING
COUNTRIES, SUCH AS THAILAND, WHICH HAVE SIMILAR
PROBLEMS. ADDITIONALLY, WE WILL ENCOURAGE THE LAO
TO COOPERATE MORE CLOSELY IN THE NARCOTICS FIELD,
NOT ONLY WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS, BUT WITH CONCERNED
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION
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